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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

Note verbale dated 21 October 1997 from the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations Office at Geneva presents its compliments to the High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights and has the honour to request dissemination of the appeal of the Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council on Human Rights Issues as an official document of the Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Committee.

Appeal

In accordance with article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights every person or group of persons has the right to profess and practise their own religion and use their own language.

After the tragic events in Abkhazia, Georgia 300,000 Georgians were forced to leave their homes and for five years have been waiting to return to their motherland. Today only 30,000 Georgians are living in the Gali district, where previously lived almost 100,000 Georgians.

In spite of numerous statements made by the Abkhazian side that they are committed to a peaceful solution of the conflict and recognize the right of refugees and displaced persons to return, it flagrantly violates the human rights of even the small number of those who have returned to Abkhazia.

The most painful blow for this population was the decision to ban the teaching of the Georgian language, literature and history.

In 1992/93 there were in Abkhazia 122 Georgian, 49 Abkhazian, 49 Armenian, 24 Russian and 62 mixed schools with 82,000 pupils, among them 35,000 Georgians.

In 1993 in the Gali region there were 58 Georgian schools, with 14,000 pupils and 1,800 qualified teachers. Last year there were 34 schools working with 4,514 pupils and 288 of them received Georgian certificates.

Today officially there is no single Georgian school. As to the mentioned 34 Georgian schools in the Gali district, they are working in clandestine circumstances and pupils and teachers are risking their lives every day.

We appeal to the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, international organizations, and the members of the group of friends of Georgia (the United States of America, Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France and the Russian Federation) which have been doing their best to reconcile the parties to the conflict, to bring to international attention the issue of the deprival of Georgians in Abkhazia, Georgia, of their rights to study Georgian subjects in the schools and to speak the Georgian language.

The Georgian people have brought their ancient language through tragic events during its history. The Georgian people have been victimized and destroyed by many invaders, but it has never given up its language and religion. It is not going to do it now either. But today, at the end of the twentieth century, we hope that the international community will give its help to the Georgian population in Abkhazia, Georgia, condemning the violation of human rights of those who are deprived of the right to use their own language, and will take all appropriate measures to stop the above-mentioned flagrant violations of recognized human rights on the territory enforced by the Abkhazian separatists.

(Signed): Rusudan BERIDZE
Deputy Secretary of the National
Security Council of Georgia
on Human Rights Issues